An Interview with Red Riding Hood, Now No Longer Little, and: The Wolf's Postscript to "Little Red Riding Hood"

Agha Shahid Ali

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AN INTERVIEW WITH RED RIDING HOOD, NOW NO LONGER LITTLE / *Agha Shahid Ali*

"How dark it was inside
the wolf!"
—Red Riding Hood in *Grimms*

Q. Whatever happened after
the wolf died?

A. My father, a self-made man,
he made good.
Mind you, no ordinary woodsman,
he slowly bought the whole forest,
had it combed for wolves.
Had it cut down.
But the wolves escaped,
like guerillas, into
the mountains.
He owns a timber industry.
I, of course, am an heiress.

Q. And your grandma?

A. She had nightmares.
She'd wake up crying, "Wolf! Wolf!"
We had to put her in a home.
I took her baskets of fruit,
flowers, cakes, wines.
Always in the red velvet cap.
I got sick of lisping for her,
"Grandma, what big eyes you have!"
That always made her laugh.
The last time I saw her, she cried,
"Save me, he's coming to eat me up!"
We gave her a quiet burial.

Q. Do you have any regrets?

A. Yes.
I lied when I said it was dark.
Now I drive through the city,
hearing wolves at every turn.
How warm it was inside the wolf!

THE WOLF'S POSTSCRIPT TO "LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD"

/ Agha Shahid Ali

First, grant me my sense of history:
I did it for posterity,
for kindergarten teachers
and a clear moral:
Little girls shouldn't wander off
is search of strange flowers,
and they musn't speak to strangers.

And then grant me my generous sense of plot:
Couldn't I have gobbled her up
right there in the jungle?
Why did I ask her where her grandma lived?
As if I, a forest-dweller,
didn't know of the cottage
under the three oak trees
and the old woman who lived there
all alone?
As if I couldn't have swallowed her years before?

And you may call me the Big Bad Wolf,
now my only reputation.
But I was no child-molester
though you'll agree she was pretty.

And the huntsman:
Was I sleeping while he snipped
my thick black fur
and filled me with garbage and stones?
I ran with that weight and fell down,
simply so children could laugh
at the noise of the stones
cutting through my belly,
at the garbage spilling out
with a perfect sense of timing,
just when the tale
should have come to an end.